ONTARIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOLUME XLVI
NUMBER 2

PAPERS &
RECORDS

ONTARIO HISTORY

IN THIS ISSUE

LETTERS FROM THE HONOURABLE CHIEF JUSTICE WILLIAM OSGOODE
BY WILLIAM COLGATE

RECOVERY OF H.M.S. TECUMSETH
BY C. H. J. SNIDER

FROM BETHLEHEM TO FAIRFIELD
EDITED BY LESLIE R. GRAY

THE MISSION TO THE FUGITIVE SLAVES AT LONDON
BY J. I. COOPER

THE ANNUAL MEETING

BOOK NOTES

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

NEWS OF HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

MUSEUM NEWS

★ ★ ★

TORONTO : PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE SOCIETY : 1954
Authorized as Second Class Mail, Post Office Department, Ottawa

© The Ontario Historical Society 1954

THE MISSION TO THE FUGITIVE SLAVES AT LONDON

By J. I. Cooper

More than a hundred years ago, April 1852, the first copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* went on sale in Toronto and Montreal bookshops. *Ontario History* drew the attention of its readers to this event through an article by Professor Fred Landon, "When Uncle Tom's Cabin came to Canada."[1] Canadians of that day, and especially Upper Canadians, had no need of Mrs. Stowe's best seller to understand the iniquities of slavery. Among them were old-established communities of negroes. In the very decade of the 'fifties, there was a new migration, occasioned by the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act in September 1850. This measure jeopardized free negroes living in the northern United States, as well as those who had fled from actual servitude. The migration of the 1850's was large, unpremeditated, and unprepared for; in a word, panic flight.[2] The effects of the exodus were felt most keenly in what is now southwestern Ontario. The negroes competed with whites for jobs. Their children created problems for schools. " . . . A deep aversion is felt by the lower classes of the colonists towards the coloured population. They say 'we wish them no harm, but we do not want them here'."[3] To the mitigation of such difficulties, various organizations gave attention. This paper is concerned with the efforts of the Church of England, through what was variously called "The Slave Mission," or "The Mission to the Free Coloured," at London, Canada West. The recent acquisition by the Public Archives of Canada of copies of the records of the Colonial Church and School Society, the agency concerned, makes an appraisal possible.[4]

The Colonial Church and School Society was no stranger to Canada when it undertook the London mission. In 1841, under its original name, the Newfoundland School Society, it had begun work in the Diocese of Quebec. Ten years later, in the wake of extensive emigration from the United Kingdom, it amalgamated with a kindred organization, the Colonial Church Society, assuming then the title employed in this paper. By this date, it was in operation in virtually all the British American dioceses, as well as in other parts of the colonial empire. The Colonial Church and School Society broadly resembled the older Anglican missionary bodies, such as the S.P.G. and S.P.C.K. It had committees in Britain and the colonies, which collected money for, and stimulated in-

(1) Fred Landon, "When Uncle Tom's Cabin came to Canada," *(Ontario History,* XLIV, No. 1, 1-5).

(2) Fred Landon, *Western Ontario and the American Frontier,* N.H., 1941, Chap. 13.

(3) *Annual Report,* Colonial Church and School Society, 1853-54, London, 1854, 30.

(4) Unless otherwise indicated, the information contained in this paper is drawn from this source. The copies are in microfilm, and comprise, annual reports, minutes, and "Occasional Papers," some of the latter being extended accounts of the London mission.

© The Ontario Historical Society 1954

terest in, the missions and schools the Society maintained. The Colonial Church and School Society was Evangelical, and remarkable for the somewhat narrow, but politically and socially important group, which provided the principal direction. Thus, the central committee in the United Kingdom contained such characteristic figures as Lord Shaftesbury, Sir Edward Buxton, and Hon A. Kinnaird, as well as " . . . other distinguished Noblemen and Gentlemen." Closely associated was a women's committee, "The Ladies' Society for Promoting the Education of Negroes," which was destined to play a decisive part in what transpired at London.

In February, 1851, the Colonial Church and School Society received a communication from the Rev. Martin M. Dillon, then stationed in Dominica, the Leeward Islands. Dillon was evangelical in outlook, ardent in temperament, and possessed of considerable West Indian experience. Dillon had been an officer in the 89th Regiment, and had served in the Islands and Canada, but he had sold out his commission in December 1842, and studied for Holy Orders. In 1844, he was labouring in Antigua, and, as has been indicated, seven years later in Dominica. When he first appeared in the Colonial Church and School Society's records, Dillon was about thirty-eight years of age, but already a victim of ill health. He pressed for an appointment in what he called "a cold colony," and, failing to secure one, returned to England late in 1852. He was given casual employment by the Society as a missioner, and soon demonstrated a real skill in coaxing half-crowns and sovereigns from reluctant North-country pockets. Dillon showed talent, too, in appealing to more exalted audiences. In April, 1853, Hon. Mrs. Kinnaird informed the secretary of the Colonial Church and School Society that statements of the Rev. Martin Dillon respecting the religious conditions of the fugitive slaves in Canada had so interested her, that she would raise the sum of £1000 annually for their instruction. It is clear from Mrs. Kinnaird's declaration that she was speaking for the women's group concerned with negro education. What had attracted her was an address delivered by Dillon before the general meeting of the Colonial Church and School Society, the report of which read: "[he spoke] from knowledge of the United States and the Colonies . . . first as an officer, . . . and afterwards as a Minister . . . Reference had been made to 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' He was able to bear testimony to the faithfulness of its delineation; indeed, the cruelties which he himself had witnessed in the West Indies even exceeded any described by Mrs. Stowe . . . " The appeal to revelation according to Mrs. Stowe is striking. Dillon would seem the logical choice to initiate the project, yet for over a year, the Society hesitated, doubtful (with only too accurate prevision) of Dillon's health. Other appointments were canvassed, Christieville in Canada East, and a chaplaincy among the English navvies engaged in railway construction in France. Finally, on June 20, 1854, it was resolved to commission him for the coloured mission,

© The Ontario Historical Society 1954

and to seek letters commendatory from the Archbishop of Canterbury. On July 4, Dillon sailed from Portsmouth.

He did not go single-handed. The Rev. Martin Dillon was accompanied by a layman, R. M. Ballantine and two student teachers, Sarah and Mary Ann Titré. Ballantine was a graduate of the Mico Charity Training College, Kingston, Jamaica, and the Titré girls were natives of Dominica. The little party was therefore entirely West Indian by extraction or experience. The application of West Indian lessons to Canadian conditions, at first thought, may seem far removed from reality. There was, however, this to be said: By means of the school maintained by the S.P.C.K., the Church of England had eased the transition from slavery to freedom in the Islands. As is well known, the apprenticeship system, an integral part of the emancipation measure of 1834, had failed.[5] In the face of that failure, it was the churches through their Sunday schools and day-schools, which had made possible the peaceful change. At his final appearance before the executive of the Colonial Church and School Society, Dillon made no exaggerated claims: Mission schools, for adults as well as for children, would provide for the refugee negroes, and prove the best medium for breaking down racial prejudice. The ideal was a central, or normal school, which would prepare teachers and catechists for the outstations. It was a modest ideal, and probably within the range of the Society. Although the statement was not made explicitly, Dillon hoped that with improved education and economic status, the negroes would merge into general provincial life. At the same time, it is clear that he was not prepared for the basic characteristic of the Canadian world. He spoke of the mitigating effects of the presence of a clergyman who was also a gentleman. The cool reliance on class-distinctions was surely far remote from realities, and bound to founder on the rugged egalitarianism of the western peninsula. It is interesting to note that even at this early date, London was favoured as the mission centre.

After a stormy passage of seven weeks, Dillon and his party landed at New York, and passed on to Montreal. There, he saw in operation a normal school for white children similar to the one he projected for coloured. This was conducted by the Colonial Church and School Society, and, four years later, by the Society in conjunction with McGill University. Thus, the present Macdonald School for Teachers, the principal source of supply for the English Protestant schools of Quebec, traces its descent from the work of the Colonial Church and School Society. At Toronto, Dillon received a licence from Bishop John Strachan, whose immense diocese at that time covered the London area. He also waited on the Earl of Elgin, then completing the last year of his Canadian governorship, whose experience in Jamaica made him sympathetic towards Dillon's

(5) W. L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies*, London, 1937.

© The Ontario Historical Society 1954

plans. Aided by Ballantine, Dillon undertook a species of survey of the negro refugee settlements. They were widely scattered, extending westward from Lake Simcoe to the Detroit River. They met the principals in the earlier rehabilitation schemes, the Rev. William King of the Elgin Association, and Josiah Henson "said to be 'the real Uncle Tom'." The survey confirmed the preference for London.

London had much to recommend it: the geographical advantages were clear. Another powerful attraction was the presence of a large group of evangelical clergy and laity, all deeply influenced by " . . . the zealous, indefatigable, and hard-working . . . Rector of London," Benjamin Cronyn. He promised the use of St. Paul's Church, and undertook to secure the site for a school. On November 20, 1854, the start was made, classes being held in the barracks until the school house was ready. The first day netted eleven youngsters; the week-end, fifty. The children were both white and coloured, the former coming from the soldiers' families. The Titré girls were placed in charge; so Dillon could make the interesting pronouncement, " . . . it is the first instance, either in the United States or in this country, in which coloured persons have been introduced as teachers of mixed classes . . . It succeeded . . . "[6] About eight weeks later, January 8, 1855, the school house was opened. Classes were divided, leaving the small children at the barracks, and "drafting" the elder to the school. The precise location of these early efforts cannot be determined. The barracks were certainly situated somewhere in "the military reserve," which occupied present-day Victoria Park. The school house is more elusive: probably it adjoined St. Paul's Cathedral.

Throughout 1855, the Free Coloured Mission flourished. Early in the year, a London Corresponding Committee, that is to say, a branch of the Colonial Church and School Society, was set up. It was representative of the solid core of local Anglicanism, Cronyn; Brough; Flood; Hayward; Goodhue; Lauriston; Wilson; Goodhue; Beecher; Labatt; Bailey. The teaching staff was reinforced by two, Hurst, a vigorous Newfoundland catechist, and Miss Jemima Williams, whom Dillon described unfeelingly as " . . . a good female teacher, — one of middle age . . . " Five years later, she died at the advanced age of twenty-nine. The new arrivals made possible an expansion of the curriculum. According to Ballantine, the basic offering was "Scripture Reading; Junior Reading; Spelling and Alphabet; Writing on Paper; Writing on Slates; Arithmetic." By mid-summer, "In addition to the above branches, the whole school receives . . . grammar, geography, mental arithmetic, natural history, natural philosophy, and . . . plain needle-work . . . " All this had a

(6) A mixed school for coloured and white children was in operation on the Buxton Mission, near Chatham. The staff, however, was white. A full description appears in the *Montreal Witness*, July 28, 1851. I am indebted for this information to John A. Johnstone, a graduate student of McGill University, who is making a study of the history of the Presbyterian churches in Canada, 1844-1875.

© The Ontario Historical Society 1954

dramatic effect on attendance, sending it skyrocketing to 450 with 960 applications for admission! The site by St. Paul's Church had to be relinquished in favour of the more spacious artillery barracks. These were a range of buildings facing what is now Wellington Street, between Dufferin and Princess avenues.[7] A letter written by Jemima Williams late in 1855 throws a golden Indian Summer glow on the school: " . . . Mr. Hurst has taught them to sing very nicely . . . My principal object in imparting instruction is to give a clear and concise view of their state by nature, and the means which God has provided for their Salvation . . . I also give them some instruction in writing, and in 'counting up,' as they call arithmetic . . . "

This was the peak of the Mission's fortune. While it still rode high, the director, the Rev. Martin Dillon, enjoyed a personal triumph. The coloured people of London and the vicinity resolved to celebrate Emancipation Day, August 1, in fitting style, with a public demonstration and religious service. This Dillon conducted for them in St. Paul's Church, whither " . . . between 600 and 700 marched with banners flying, and headed by the band from the barracks. I preached from St. John, XIII, 34-36 . . . " In the afternoon, there was a luncheon, attended by the mayor and "the most respectable citizens." The event marked was, of course, slave emancipation within the British Empire, effected twenty-one years before. The sentiments enshrined must have been entirely familiar to Dillon, and the leading part he played attested his experienced approach to the problem of the fugitive American negro in Canada.

Even then disaster was not far off. The winter of 1855-56 must have been unusually severe. The Titré girls fell ill. " . . . One is now confined to her room with the seeds of consumption; the other is spitting blood . . . " In the early months of 1856, Dillon's health suddenly failed. He was not robust, he bore heavy responsibility, and he may have felt conscience-stricken at the fate of the young women he had brought from Dominica. Then there were financial worries, arising chiefly from the rapid expansion of the school itself. He suffered what would be recognized to-day as a nervous breakdown. Dillon displayed all the distressing symptoms. He developed a persecution complex directed against the secretary of the Colonial Church and School Society. This was the more unhappy, since the official had recently died, and since there was nothing in the record to bear out the charges. Dillon alleged that his reports were garbled, retracted, and then repeated in vague terms. A personal vendetta next broke out between him and Hurst, the junior master. In May, 1856, a commission set up by the Bishop of Toronto, reviewed the case, which was rapidly becoming scandalous. Dillon was handled with considerable charity. His intemperate language was deplored, and his allegations respecting the reports were described merely as unsus-

(7) F. F. Passmore, *London, A Plan . . . shewing . . . the Military Reserve . . . 1853 . . .*

© The Ontario Historical Society 1954

tained. He was, however, rebuked, and warned against similar imprudence. Dillon thereupon resigned, and was followed by Ballantine, who apparently felt that he was in some way implicated in the disaster which had overtaken his chief. Somewhat earlier (May 5), Sarah and Mary Ann Titré had begun their long journey home to Dominica. For a few months more, Dillon lingered on in Colonial Church and School Society Correspondence. He wrote distracted letters, raking out old charges, and begging for money. At its meeting on November 4, 1856, the Society voted £40 to pay his passage home to the United Kingdom. It is pleasant to know that Dillon recovered. At a later date he returned to Canada, settling again in the Diocese of Huron. He served at Port Stanley and at Port Dover, and it was at the latter place that he died in the winter of 1884.

The elimination of Dillon did not end the mission to the negro refugees at London. It continued for at least three years more, that is until the summer of 1859. During this period, the principals were Miss Williams, Hurst, and a new master, Thomas Hughes. They maintained a continuity, although since no one of them had West Indian contacts, one of the unique features of the experiment had gone. A striking note by the Rev. Isaac Hellmuth, commissioner of the Colonial Church and School Society, keys the picture. " . . . In the afternoon, accompanied by Dr. Cronyn I attended Mr. Hurst's Adult . . . School consisting entirely of coloured people . . . It was an interesting sight to see so many grown-up men and women sitting like little children to be instructed in the first rudiments of both secular and religious knowledge . . . " This is one of the few extended descriptions of the school. At an earlier time, Archdeacon Neil Bethune, on a visitation of the western deaneries had reported briefly that he was " . . . highly gratified with the mode of instruction . . . [and] . . . the free and happy manner in which white and coloured were classed . . . " Col. Tulloch, the military superintendant, was favourably impressed likewise, "[by] the admirable system of education . . . " The terms, mode of instruction, or, system of education, seem to have been used in a general sense. It is probable, however, that some form of monitorial teaching was employed. Although this system would be regarded as out of date by progressive instructors of the period, it would explain the large enrollment of the school in comparison with the small staff.[8] It would also help to explain the extreme economy with which the school was conducted. It was in 1859 that the end came, and then, not so much in defeat as in the vindication of the principles the Colonial Church and School Society missionaries upheld. They reported that the public schools of London accepted negro children without qualification or segregation.

(8) G. W. Spragge, *Monitorial Schools in the Canadas, 1810-1845*, University of Toronto, thesis, 1935.

© The Ontario Historical Society 1954

For more than a decade, the Colonial Church and School Society continued to aid the negroes living in Canada West. Indeed, according to Vernon's *Old Church in the New Dominion,* it expended over $60,000 in this type of social service. Since it was done chiefly outside London, it falls beyond the limits of this paper. Chatham, Windsor, and Dresden were the new centres. Between Dresden and London there was a direct connection, because it was there that Jemima Williams died,[9] and Hughes, who had embraced the ecclesiastical state, ministered. On one later occasion, London did appear. In the summers of 1865 and 1866, two students belonging to Huron College "undertook a tour among the coloured people in the towns of the western part of the province." It is not certain whether they laboured among the refugees or among the general negro population. Probably it was the latter, for, as the reports of the Society indicate, there was a substantial draining away of coloured folk after 1865, with the conclusion, that is, of the Civil War. Nor is it possible to identify by name these Levites from records presently in the possession of the College or the Diocese of Huron. They will have to stand as anonymous representatives of what the Rev. Martin Dillon had observed ten years before: " . . . the feelings of the Christian people of all denominations [in London] were most favourable . . . "

(9) *Montreal Witness,* January 18, 1860.

© The Ontario Historical Society 1954